

# Books

BY STEPHEN KNEZOVICH,  
Contributing Editor



## **Ruanaidh: The Story of Art Rooney and His Clan**

Art Rooney Jr. with Roy McHugh  
Self-Published, \$30

Arthur J. Rooney—or AJR, as he is referred to in *Ruanaidh: The Story of Art Rooney and His Clan*—could not only tell a story, his life also was a story. Heck, when you've spent 87 years in the same city and you're the owner of a premier professional sports franchise that won four world championships in a single decade—there is nothing but story fodder.

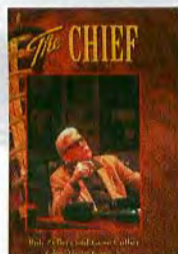
*Ruanaidh* (pronounced Ru-ah-nee), the Gaelic word for Rooney, is full of just about every single one of those stories, providing page space for every anecdote and colorful character who ever stepped foot within the city's limits—and therefore, no doubt, crossed paths with AJR—between 1901 and 1988. It's all here, every North Side bar brawl, every minute of the Steelers' now-historic drafts between 1969 and 1974 and every bit of family legend.

The stories are culled from “several dozen voluminous journals” kept by Arthur J. Rooney Jr., AJR's second son and currently the Steelers vice president, but the task of transcribing and organizing the stories was left to Art Jr.'s collaborator, Roy McHugh, a longtime columnist for the now-defunct *Pittsburgh Press*. McHugh, no doubt, had his work cut out for him, and it's amazing that he managed to create any kind of cohesive narrative thread, especially when considering that Art Jr.'s journals were handwritten and in a style he refers to as “stream-of-consciousness,” recording his memories “pretty much as they occurred to [him].” He even compares Irish-American Rooney's writing style with that of another famous Irish writer, James Joyce, because the two share a similar loquacious style that digresses and digresses often.

And digress the book does. There is a lot here. So much, in fact, that *Ruanaidh* will not be read in a single afternoon, but over many, many afternoons. But it doesn't necessarily need to be read in order, and it will still retain its status as part biography, part

memoir, part sports book. *Ruanaidh* clocks in at nearly 500 dense, sprawling pages, with the events following a loose timeline, but every page contains a multitude of stories—snippets that form the bigger story—not just the history of AJR, but also the rise of the Steelers franchise and the life of Art Jr., as well as 20th-century Pittsburgh—all of which, you could argue, are one and the same.

The bottom line is this: No matter how much you think you know about Pittsburgh or the Steelers or the Rooneys—such as how AJR made his fortune in one week of horse betting; that he bought the Steelers for a mere \$2,500; or that Art Jr., as the scouting director, was responsible for acquiring Franco Harris—you could never know it all. The cast of characters is vast and varied, full of familiar faces as well as unfamiliar ones. And whether these tales are family lore or urban legend or the honest truth, with stories this good, it matters not.



**The Chief**  
Rob Zellers and Gene Collier  
University of Pittsburgh Press,  
\$17.95

Thanks to the University of Pittsburgh Press, *The Chief*, the “most successful single play in the long and distinguished profile of Pittsburgh Public Theater,” has finally been immortalized in print. This one-man, one-act play was cobbled together over many years by Rob Zellers, a longtime Pittsburgh Public Theater education director, and Gene Collier, an award-winning columnist for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and much of the approximately 90-minute monologue is based on the journal writings of Arthur J. Rooney Jr. (Yep, the same journal entries that spawned *Ruanaidh*—yet the crossover, unsurprisingly, is minimal.)

As Zellers points out in his introduction, this play isn't just for the owners of opera glasses, this is the “one Pittsburgh arts entity on which the reliable theater crowd joins Joe from Munhall in his Bradshaw jersey for the same joyful purpose”—to celebrate Arthur J. Rooney, *The Chief*. The book includes a foreword by Art Jr., as well as photographs of AJR, his family and members of the Steelers. If you're the type of person—myself included—who likes to read the book before you see the movie (or in this case, play), then go out and pick up a copy of *The Chief*, but then go see the play!